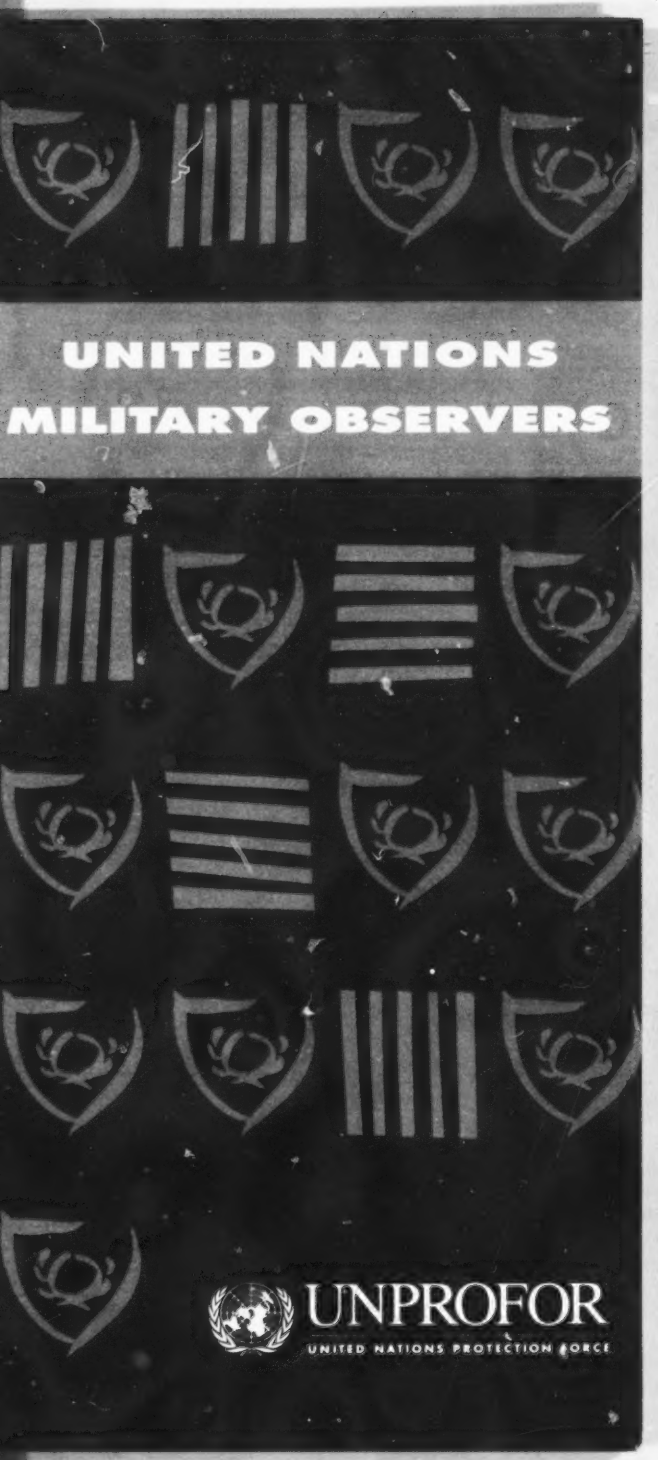
UNITED NATIONS
MILITARY OBSERVERS
UNPROFOR
UNITED NATIONS PROTECTION FORCE

The whine of incoming artillery shells cuts through the silence at a United Nations military observation post monitoring the deadly exchange of firepower between warring parties.

Each impact is recorded by a UN military observer watching the explosions through binoculars some distance from the hostilities.

Steen Johansen

Military observers - highly trained soldiers who monitor some of the world's worst crisis spots - are "the eyes and ears" in the field of the United Nations Security Council.

Known as UNMOs, military observers play a crucial role in the UN peace-keeping operation in the former Yugoslavia.

Without them the United Nations would be denied firsthand knowledge of the progress of the fighting or the level of destruction occurring in areas of hostility.

Along with almost 23,000 troops and logistics/support units, UNMOs are one of three military components of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), which was established in the former Yugoslavia in February 1992.

"UNMOs are called on at great personal risk to witness attacks on military and civilian targets"

There are more than 430 UNMOs from almost 30 countries deployed throughout the United Nations Protected Areas, Bosnia-Herzegovina (including the "safe areas"), the "pink zones" (areas of conflict next to the UNPAs), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and at airfields in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

UNMOs, who are unarmed, are called on at great personal risk to witness attacks on military and civilian targets so they can report on the level of fighting.

Their most useful weapons are sharp eyes and alert ears.

The duties of UNMOs are to:

- Monitor the various agreements on cease-fires, withdrawals and demilitarization (including those established in the "safe areas");
- Patrol both sides of the conflict in the "pink zones", within and outside the UNPAs, and along the confrontation lines;
- Help resolve local difficulties by liaising with all sides of the conflict;
- Monitor the ban on military flights over Bosnia-Herzegovina - known as the No-Fly Zone - as well as monitor flights from airfields within and around Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia;
- Monitor the demilitarisation of the small but strategic Prevlaka Peninsula; and
- Investigate allegations of aggression or cease-fire violations.

When conflicts start, UNMOs are the first to go in - but always the last to leave. Their presence often deters attacks, as was the case when shelling stopped in Gorazde, eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina, for the first time in three weeks after eight UNMOs entered the town on 16 June.

Steen Johansen

Often working in groups of three or four, UNMOs begin each day by arranging safe passage to patrol certain areas and set up observation posts on both sides of the conflict.

In this way they gather accurate evidence of attacks by witnessing the firing of small-arms, mortar, rocket, tank or artillery rounds. This is reported back to UNPROFOR headquarters.

UNPROFOR collates this information so it can confirm reports of attacks or troop movements.

Steen Johansen

UNMOs receive special training when they begin their job with UNPROFOR.

Because they are experienced army personnel from their respective countries, UNMOs' basic military training is the foundation for their work in the former Yugoslavia.

They must also learn special reporting and negotiating techniques as well as acquire a knowledge of the people, the environment, culture, political history and language.

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UNMOs are given time to aquire these skills before they are sent to the "hot spots", where conditions can be extremely dangerous. At check-points and in the field, they often face hostile guards or troops brandishing cocked weapons.

But although they average one serious casualty a month from gunshots, mines or vehicle accidents, there have, fortunately, been no fatalities among UNMOs since UNPROFOR began.

"UNMOs operate unarmed so they pose no threat and are accessible to both civilians and the military"

UNMOs operate unarmed so they pose no threat and are accessible to both civilians and the military.

Because their job is to report events impartially, they are regularly rotated to avoid being "worn out" in the most hostile areas.

This also spreads the experience of UNMOs around the different areas of responsibility to help UNPROFOR achieve its primary task - to find a long-term peaceful solution to the war.